DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 376 473 CS 214 596

AUTHOR Jones, Ginny Pompei
TITLE A Revival of the Imagination in Research Projects: Collaboration and Ethnography.
PUB DATE 19 Mar 94
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (45th, Nashville, TN, March 16-19, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Higher Education; *Imagination; *Interviews; *Research Papers (Students); Student Needs; Theory Practice Relationship; *Thinking Skills; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Composition Theory

ABSTRACT

Many practitioners in the writing field tend to think of research skills as logical, analytical, abstracting abilities, not as personal, expressive or imaginative. Even many contemporary literary and composition theorists believe that theory must be divorced from everyday life. According to Richard Rorty, in many intellectual circles, the more irrelevant to human life (and the personal) that theory can stay, the more respectable it will be. However, many theorists today, such as Paulo Freire, Michael Polanyi and Mary Warnock, are forging the way in developing holistic pedagogies that aim to develop the intuitive, poetic, and personal as well as the logical and analytic. "If we think of the imagination as part of intelligence," Warnock points out, "then we must be ready to admit that like the rest of human intelligence, it needs educating." Given these concerns, composition instructors might set the imagination to work by asking students to learn from interpreting varied perceptions of reality; students can profit by engaging in several writing workshop practices: journal writing, writing group process logs, and collaborative and diverse-genre research projects. Those research projects could involve interviews, which allow students to construct meaning while satisfying their natural thirst for experiential learning. (Contains 28 references.) (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 376 473

A REVIVAL OF THE IMAGINATION IN RESEARCH PROJECTS. COLLABORATION AND ETHNOGRAPHY

GINNY POMPEI JONES

CS214596

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at CCCC's
Nashville, Tennessee
March 19, 1994

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
G. Jones
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

A Revival of the Imagination in Research Projects.
Collaboration and Ethnography

How many of us think of the imagination in conjunction with teaching research in composition courses? Many of us practitioners tend to think of research skills as logical, analytical, abstracting abilities, not as personal, expressive, or imaginative. Even many contemporary literary and composition theorists believe that theory must be divorced from everyday life. According to Richard Rorty, in many intellectual circles, the more irrelevant to human life (and the personal) that theory can stay, the more respectable it will be (68). To this way of thinking, science and morality are safe if confined to their separate cubbyholes. Logic and emotion will not mix. Rational ideas command our respect, and according to Michael Polanyi, who traces these notions back to John Locke in the Enlightenment, experience gives us empirical evidence that is essential to any proof of ideas (5,9).

This type of epistemology dominates science, but how do we apply it to composition teaching? We tend to teach invention (the generative stage of writing) as a separate logical activity, usually a solitary one, practiced before drafting begins. The emotions might enter into consideration when polishing an argument in terms of adding appeals, but other than some freewriting or mapping types of exercises, we do not generally involve the emotions or imagination as part of constructing an argument or writing research papers.

Let me pose a few provocative ideas about imagination from other thinkers. Coleridge defines imagination as "the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into everything which is the object of his contemplation" (Biographia II 253, qtd. on Rose 354). Paul

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Ricoeur speaks of our relation to written texts in terms similar to those of I. A. Richards--as expanding our worlds--as bridging the gap between self and other by connecting our singular predicates with common meanings--allowing the imagination to work (Ricoeur 37). He speaks of writing and reading as dialectical, as simultaneous processes of distancing of oneself from the text and appropriating it--making the strange familiar (43). Edgar Smith Rose defines the imaginative moment as one when "we become finders and makers of our own humanity" (354). These dynamic notions of the imaginative process are broadening, allowing for an inclusive power of mind to connect, to communicate with the alien as well as one's own, and to work on our world, not merely the written text.

The above concepts reinforce my notions that invention is a recursive process which involves the whole person, his irrational (often characterized as emotional) side as well as the rational one, and that we should also recognize that it involves other people. In this view, when we teach invention, we should open it to a dialectical approach. As cognitive psychologist Suzanne Benack and her colleagues argue, "A dialectical model of knowledge is likely to foster creativity...because it represents the process of thinking as creative" (205). They summarize this model as fostering "developmental transformation...occurring via constitutive and interactive relationships" (202).

Composition teachers may lead the way in reforming classroom strategies according to a model of empowering writers like that which Paulo Freire championed in his work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. They work at expanding classroom identities in a holistic way that prizes a self which is not only logical and analytic, but which allows for the intuitive, the poetic, the personal. According to Cy Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, "The

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

governing spirit of the writing workshop is the modern rhetorical perspective...where individual creativity, the energy of personal statement within a community of interested readers, is more valuable than timid or enforced capitulation to hackneyed thought" (104). Responding to the "call for a shift in the identity roles offered in the classroom," such teachers allow for what Robert Brooke calls "underlife" behaviors that may seem to "be in conflict with accepted ways of thinking and acting" (150, 141).

Students and teachers crave to reveal more of themselves than the traditional paradigm of depersonalized writing would allow. And teachers who use this writing workshop model are those who are trying to educate holistically--to create writers who can see the world in new ways, to see, by detaching themselves from their usual perspectives "certain objects in the world...as signifying something else" (Warnock 197). Richard Ohmann, in The Politics of Letters, asserts the need for this sort of teaching to enable us to "understand in a unified way the human condition" (316).

Just as Michael Polanyi insists that imagination and intuition are at the foundation of scientific and mathematical thought, he believes that the worship of the impersonal standard for civic or moral life must be ended (214). And he also believes that experience--the personal--constitutes the imagination. "Our conceptual imagination, like its artistic counterpart, draws inspiration from contacts with experience" (46). Mary Warnock emphasizes that we all exercise this power of mind in conversation and in everyday life. In her study, Imagination, she discusses its connection with modern teaching.

> ...the imagination has emerged...as necessarily connected with our emotions. And this is of the greatest importance. For if we think of imagination as a part of our intelligence, universally, then we must be ready to admit that, like the rest of human intelligence, it needs

5 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> educating; but this will now entail, if we are right, an education not only of the intelligence, but, going along with it, of the feelings.(202)

The theoretical underpinnings of my paper also include beliefs in using collaborative writing groups to stimulate the writers' imaginations and to diminish the negative effects of the competitive ethic in promoting a cooperative approach for student writers. As Jerome Bruner eloquently maintains, negotiations with others help us to define our reality, and "We know far too little about learning from vicarious experience, from interaction..." (68). He may thus point the way to rich solutions to educational dichotomies which we have only begun to grasp. Ann Gere was basically discussing the awakening of imagination by group interaction as she said learning takes place "when they challenge one another with questions, when they use...evidence and information..., when they develop relationships among issues, when they evaluate their own thinking..." (69). Karen LeFevre's work on the social aspects of invention asserts that an introspective view of solo invention "may fail to take advantage of the synergy that can arise from social interactions" (26).

Throughout the history of American composition teaching, the rational/irrational separation we have inherited is one which divorces the intuition or emotions from "reason." As the other presenters have already mentioned, this rift is usually most evident in approaches to teaching research, analysis, and argumentation. Such methods often stand in the way of student writers' personal connection with their subjects. My experience through twenty-one years of teaching has led me to recognize this problem, which often results in uninvolved, stilted, "dead" writing, writer's block, and ultimately loss of interest in and fear of writing that for many people lasts a lifetime.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

So how can we set the imagination to work in teaching nonfiction writing? As Ann Berthoff expresses in Reclaiming the Imagination, "Studying perception and the apprehension of reality is a way to reclaim the imagination as the forming power of the mind" (4). In order to learn from interpreting varied perceptions of reality--their own and others'--students can profit by engaging in several writing workshop practices: journal writing, writing group process logs, and collaborative and diverse-genre research projects. For the purpose of our discussion, I particularly recommend such ethnographic methods as interviews to be separate assignments as well as components of the latter research projects. These interviews allow students to construct meaning while satisfying their natural thirst for experiential learning. Ethnography writers describe the issues they are researching according to the diverse experiences of their subjects--people whom they select as appropriate for their own research needs and interests. I usually suggest that students select topics connected with local issues on campus or community, on politics or environment or health, family lore or rituals, or on careers of interest to them--all of which connect with their "real world."

Course readings would lend themselves to a variety of issues, and preparatory exercises such as detailed observations and mock interviews should be worked into the schedule, as well as practice in transcribing and summarizing dialogue from audio and videotape. I would assign sections of James Spradley's The Ethnographic Interview for useful information about selecting and approaching informants and conducting interviews. Before their actual meetings with informants, students need to write introductory letters requesting interviews, and to conduct background research, as well as anticipate sensitive points or possible problems with informants' privacy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

and confidentiality. They may have to devise release forms and negotiate places to meet for interview sessions. The students' peer groups may discuss many of these issues in addition to helping to plan open-ended questions that will encourage interesting interviews. The teacher's role is broadened to one of facilitator and consultant on community resources as well as on writing. After the interviews, the students interpret the meaning of their talk in context with their other research. They attempt to construct an ethnographer's "emic" view--an analysis of meaning which presents a coherent narrative about what is unique or interesting about the subject's world.

Let me marshall support for the ethnographic approach's potential in liberatory education. In "Fieldwork in Common Places", Mary Louise Pratt discusses the privilege and dilemma of ethnographic writing. It is both a process and a product--with the "scientific position of speech [as] that of an observer fixed on the edge of a space, looking in and/or down upon what is other. Subjective experience, on the other hand, is spoken in the middle of things..." (Clifford and Marcus 32). Patricia Clough emphasizes that using ethnography for social criticism threatens positivist notions of data-collection and breaks down the opposition between public and private (136-37). Linda Brodkey recommends the use of interviews in a narrative as a questioning or critique of culture as well as a rendering of experience (46). As James Clifford writes in "On Ethnographic Allegory," the writer must impose coherence "as alter ego, provoker, and editor of the discourse" (106). Paul Rabinow recommends in his interdisciplinary approaches the infusion of imagination into research by anthropological writing--a dialogical, potentially Bakhtinian textualization (243-46). He also emphasizes the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

writer's need to be self-conscious about style, rhetoric, and dialectic in producing anthropological work (244).

In Farther Along: Transforming Dichotomies in Rhetoric and Composition, James Zebroski's essay discusses the way that ethnographic writing encourages the blurring of teachers' and students' roles. All become researchers and learners as the community members selected as subjects are the experts. The class ethnographies become the texts, and discussion and analysis centers on the contradictions and connections with the readers' own world views or "propriospects", to use the ethnographic term. Since, in this type of course plan, the students' topics may be individually selected or conducted in pairs or groups, there will be a tremendous variety of material for the class to consider when it gathers to work on generating topics or questions, to analyze results, and to publish products in different stages of completion. In the past, I have used Studs Terkel's Working as a model for students' interviews, but I would add readings by such writers as Shirley Brice Heath, Joan Didion, John McPhee, and interesting samples of previous student work.

Through the sort of individualized instruction this ethnography can provide, students can learn to build imaginatively on their research. They can take what is significant in the social, conversational setting of an interview and interpret it in terms of their existing knowledge. They must find relevant connections between the subjects' experiences and their own perceptions, and escape, at least for a time, narrowly egocentric ways of viewing the world. According to sound ethnographic principles, they must learn to suspend judgment and refrain from making premature conclusions. They must focus on personal biases and remain open to new questions that will arise from their research. Thus, a student's own feelings about a topic

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

are not ignored or denigrated, but become a part of the research. This sort of critical inquiry also serves a richly generative purpose as it stimulates curiosity about unexpected aspects of the issues and often leads students to other sources.

By using methods open to a diversity of discourse, and by making a place for individual and collaborative writings, we can accomplish what John Trimbur advocates from Habermas' work: challenging students (and ourselves as teachers) to "open gaps in the conversation through which differences may emerge" (614). Such a discourse model is one which insists that participants agree to disagree. Students in collaborative groups, no matter what their task, must constantly negotiate their roles in the group as well as fulfill their assigned tasks. In this complex social setting, the students must draw on experience, must become emotionally as well as intellectually involved in the work of writing. They enter into an act of literacy by relating their personal knowledge to a public discourse. As Michael Polanyi argues for such educational methods, "into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known" (xvii).

In summary, I am relating modern composition pedagogy to the traditional antithesis of imagination and reason by proposing methods which can help to incorporate the imagination into our teaching of academic discourse. At the heart of Lev Vygotsky's ideas is the notion that we learn language from others and then internalize it. Foregrounding any practical discussion in such theory about the social construction of meaning, I would advocate the potential of two approaches: first, collaborative invention; second, the use of ethnographic methods in students' research projects. This would particularly emphasize the use of the interview, in multi-genre

10 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

research projects, by definition using several types of data, thus allowing for and stimulating individual creativity (Romano 139). Both types of teaching practices can enliven the composition and literature classrooms. By connecting with social experiential learning, these approaches encourage genuine literacy which Robert Pattison called "the passionate awakening of the mind" (qtd. in Schor 102). This awakening results when the imagination is engaged in ordering the chaos of real experience--or in Ann Berthoff's terms, making meaning.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WORKS CITED- Virginia Pompei Jones (CCCCs, March 94)

Benack, Suzanne, Michael Basseches, and Thomas Swan. "Dialectical Thinking and Adult Creativity." Handbook of Creativity. John Glover, Royce Ronning, and Cecil Reynolds, eds. New York: Plenum, 1989.

Berthoff, Ann E., ed. Reclaiming the Imagination: Philosophical Perspectives for Writers and Teachers of Writing. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1984.

Brodkey, Linda. "Writing Ethnographic Narratives." Written Communication 4.1(1987): 25-50.

Brooke, Robert. "Underlife and Writing Instruction." College Composition and Communication 38.2 (May 1987): 141-53.

Bruner, Jerome. Actual Minds, Possible Worlds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986.

Clifford, James. "On Ethnographic Allegory." Eds. James Clifford and George Marcus. Writing Culture:The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: U California P,1986. 98-121.

Clough, Patricia Ticineto. The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Seabury, 1970.

Gere, Ann Ruggles. Writing Groups: History, Theory, Implications. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Hillocks, George, Jr. Research on Written Composition. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1986.

Knoblauch, C.H. and Lil Brannon. Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1984.

LeFevre, Karen Burke. Invention as a Social Act. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois U P, 1987.

Ohmann, Richard M. The Politics of Letters. Scranton, PA: Harper & Row, 1987.

Polanyi, Michael. Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1958.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Fieldwork in Common Places." in Clifford and Marcus, eds. 27-50.

Rabinow, Paul. "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology." in Clifford and Marcus, eds. 234-61.

Richards, I. A. The Philosophy of Rhetoric. New York: Oxford UP, 1936.

Ricoeur, Paul. Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning. Fort Worth: Texas Christian UP, 1976.

Romano, Tom. "The Multigenre Research Paper: Melding Fact, Interpretation, and Imagination." in Daiker and Morenberg, eds. The Writing Teacher as Researcher: Essays in Theory and Practice of Class-Based Research. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1990.123-41.

Rorty, Richard. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979.

Rose, Edgar Smith. "The Anatomy of Imagination." College English 27.5 (1966): 346-54.

Shor, Ira. Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration 1969-1984. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986.

Spradley, James P. The Ethnographic Interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979.

Tinberg, Howard B. "Ethnography in the Writing Classroom." College Composition and Communication 40 (1989): 79-82.

Trimbur, John. "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." College English 511 (1989): 602-16.

Vygotsky, Lev S. Thought and Language. (Revised Ed.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986.

Warnock, Mary. Imagination. Berkeley: U California P, 1976.

Zebroski, James Thomas. "Rewriting Composition as a Postmodern Discipline: Transforming the Research/Teaching Dichotomy." Eds. Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly. Farther Along: Transforming Dichotomies in Rhetoric and Composition. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1990. 168-82.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE